

Grade 11 Summer Reading Assignment

Please purchase or borrow a copy of *The Secret Life Of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd. **Read the entire book.** Keep a reading log of ideas/ reactions/ questions as you read. Be prepared to discuss the novel when you return to school in the Fall.

Below are the Essential Questions, Theme Topics, and Key Literary Terms that we will use for our analysis of *The Secret Life of Bees*. These questions, theme topics, and terms will guide our discussion and analysis, so it is important for you to be familiar with them as you read.

Essential Questions

- ⇒ How does prejudice affect our understanding of others?
- ⇒ How do our society and family influence us?
- ⇒ How can society's wrongs be righted?
- ⇒ What qualities or characteristics do individuals possess that allow them to challenge societal expectations?
- ⇒ Why do people keep secrets?
- ⇒ How do people recover from pain and conflict?
- ⇒ How do children become adults?

Theme Topics from *The Secret Life of Bees*

During your reading of *The Secret Life of Bees* look for and mark passages that make a point or statement about these possible theme topics:

- ⇒ **Growing Up**
- ⇒ **Women**
- ⇒ **Home**

⇒ **Secrets**

⇒ **Oppression (especially, racism)**

⇒ **Social Injustice**

⇒ **Challenging Rules/Expectations**

⇒ **Bees**

⇒ **The Black Madonna**

*Remember that a Literary Theme is

- ⇒ the controlling idea of a story
- ⇒ an arguable comment or statement an author makes about the nature of humankind or society
- ⇒ a truth that can be taken from the specifics of the story and applied to society in general
- ⇒ some human truth that the author wants the reader to understand about life, the human experience, or human nature

Key Literary Terms: theme, symbol, characterization

Reflections by the Author on *The Secret Life of Bees*: On Sue Monk Kidd's website, she reflects on many different aspects of the novel including her

inspiration, bee lore, the theme of race, the black Madonna, and the Lady of Chains. See her website for more background information:

[ns.aspx?t=b&i=8](#)

<http://www.suemonkidd.com/Reflectio>

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”- Martin Luther King, Jr., 1964

The Secret Life of Bees Study Guide

Directions: As you read *The Secret Life of Bees* complete the following study guide questions. These questions will help you **remember** and **reflect** on important plot elements from your reading, so that your analysis over the first few weeks is in-depth and accurate.

Chapter One

1. The narrator makes an allusion about the bees, “Looking back on it now, I want to say the bees were sent to me. I want to say they showed up like the angel Gabriel appearing to the Virgin Mary, setting events in motion I never could have guessed” What does she allude to and why?
2. Lily says that the bees could have stung her until she died, and it would not have been the worst thing to happen. What do you learn about her from this?
3. Lily describes her mother’s death. She does not directly say so, but she implies that she caused her mother’s death. How did that happen?
4. Why does Lily “smell every perfume bottle they had?”
5. Why does Lily pick scabs and feel that she is “impersonating a girl?”
6. When Rosaleen stands up to T. Ray about the chick, Lily says, “his boots whispered uncle all the way down the hall” What does she mean? What literary term is used in the quote?
7. Why does T. Ray tell Lily about her mother before she starts school?
8. Lily says that she “understood that a new rooftop would do wonders” for her. What does she mean?

9. Why does Lily say that Rosaleen “had less sense than I’d dreamed?”

10. Every chapter begins with a quote about bees. Each one was chosen to suit the chapter. Why do you think the quote about the missing queen was chosen for chapter one? Who is the missing queen?

Chapter Two

1. Lily says to Rosaleen, “What can they do to you with a policeman right here?” What happened immediately afterward?

2. What does Lily say “nearly did me in?”

3. What two things does the conversation between Lily and T. Ray reveal?

4. What does Lily believe will “sink [her] forever”? Why might this knowledge “sink” her?

5. Lily alludes to Thomas Edison when she talks about her father’s ability to think of punishments. What does she mean?

6. What is the meaning of the metaphor of the jar: “Lily Melissa Owens, your jar is open?”

7. Why is Lily angry at Rosaleen?

8. On page 52, Rosaleen says, “I guess I can go to my grave now, because I’ve seen it all.” What does she mean?

9. Why does Rosaleen get angry with Lily?

10. Why does Lily call Rosaleen “dumb?”

11. Consider the description of Rosaleen and Lily’s thought: “Mother, forgive.” What does this tell you about Lily’s relationship with Rosaleen?

12. Explain the importance of Lily’s ability to lie.

13. Why do you think the quote for chapter 2 was chosen? Who starts in a new “suitable place”?

Chapter Three

1. What do you think is the significance of Rosaleen’s odd dream?

2. What does Lily’s question and Rosaleen’s answer about the Civil Rights Act reveal about them?

3. Lily realizes “there is nothing but mystery in the world...” Why does she think so?
4. The bee quote at the start of the chapter talks about how to find the queen. Why is this appropriate for this chapter?

Chapter Four

1. Lily believes her “body knows things” What does she think her body knows?
2. Why is Lily’s thought about the black Mary, “...she could straighten you out if necessary,” both wonderful and terrifying?
3. Why does May begin to sing “Oh! Susanna”?
4. How does Rosaleen’s behavior as they walk across the rainy lawn contrast with her behavior when she talked about the Civil Rights Act in Chapter 3?
5. What does Lily say is the secret of a good lie?
6. Why does Lily say “...my skin had never felt so white to me”? (78).
7. Explain the significance of the quote at the beginning of the chapter.

Chapter Five

1. How does the “honey song” say “everything” about living in the pink house?
2. What does August say to her that delights Lily?
3. How does Lily describe June?
4. What does June say that is a “revelation” to Lily? What does Lily allude to in her reaction when she says she has “righteous indignation?”
5. What does Lily conclude about color when she goes outside? How is her expression of her thought indicative of the author’s sense of humor?
6. Why does Lily feel uncomfortable when they are watching TV?
7. Why does Lily think August told her the story of Beatrix the nun?
8. What is the most important bee yard rule, according to August?
9. Explain the significance of Lily’s wondering about May’s sensitivity: “Would it divide the hurt in two, make it lighter to bear, the way feeling someone’s joy seemed to double it?”

10. What happened to April?
11. Lily says that she knew the world was not fair long before she turned eleven. What does she mean?
12. What is the wailing wall? What does Lily put into the wailing wall?
13. In the quote at the beginning of the chapter, it points out that the bees live in darkness. How is that true for Lily in this chapter?

Chapter Six

1. Why will June not get married?
2. What is the number one question in South Carolina, and why is it asked?
3. Who are the “Daughters of Mary?”
4. August reads the Bible verses attributed to Mary. Why are these verses especially appropriate for black people?
5. What is the miracle of “Our Lady of Chains”? How did she get her name?
6. Why does Lily not touch Mary’s heart?
7. According to the book, “you can never underestimate the power of cutthroat competition” What is meant by this?
8. Why is August sad at the thought of a rocket landing on the moon?
9. The quote at the beginning of the chapter says the queen produces something to attract the workers. Who is the queen in this chapter, and what does she produce? Who are the workers she attracts?

Chapter Seven

1. “At my school they made fun of colored people’s lips and noses. I myself had laughed at these jokes, hoping to fit in” (Describe what you think about Lily’s thoughts in this passage. Does it surprise you that she laughed?)
2. Why does Zach get upset when Lily suggests he could be a professional player?
3. Zach says: “You gotta imagine what’s never been” What does he mean?
4. What does Lily feel she needs to do before she can tell August the truth about herself? What is she afraid of?
5. What shocks Lily when she is riding with Zach? Why is this thought such a shock to

Lily?

6. “Danger, I realized, was a thing you got used to” What two dangers is Lily facing when she says this?
7. Why does Lily cry?
8. Why does Zach tell her to go back to her side of the truck?
9. What is the metaphor Lily uses and what does she mean?
10. Explain the significance of the quotation at the beginning of the chapter.

Chapter Eight

1. What does Lily want to say to the bees?
2. Why does August tell Lily about the thirty-two words for love in the Eskimo language?
3. August Why is it a little ironic for her to say this to Lily?
4. Explain what August means when she says, “I swear, if you listen to my chest with a stethoscope, what you’d hear is that story going on and on in my Big Mama’s voice”
5. Contrast August’s story with Lily’s. Why does Lily say her story “sort of” ends her life?
6. What does Big Mama say about lady beekeepers and what does it reveal about her?
7. August describes Big Mama’s story of hearing the bees sing on Christmas Eve. Does August mean the story literally? How does this relate to the title of the book?
8. When August could not get a teaching job, she became a housekeeper for a white family, but she says of June “you wouldn’t catch her keeping house for white people” How does this help explain June’s resentment of Lily?
9. “The hardest thing on earth is choosing what matters” Explain the importance of August’s statement as it applies to Lily.
10. Lily states, “...I loved the idea of bees having a secret life, just like the one I was living” What is the major difference between the secret life of bees and the secret life of Lily?
11. What happens when Lily lets the bees cover her?
12. Lily notices that the black Mary label she had stuck on herself is coming “unglued” (How is this a metaphor for Lily’s situation?)

13. What does May want to celebrate?
14. What are the people in town stirred up about?
15. Why is Lily sick of “skin pigment?”
16. What does Lily do while Mr. Forrest and Zach are out of the room?
17. What does Lily ask her father? Why does she ask this?
18. Why does Lily write a letter to her father only to tear it all up when she is done?
19. What does Lily finally do at the end of chapter eight?
20. How does the quote at the beginning of the chapter explain Lily’s fear about telling August the truth?

Chapter Nine

1. Why does August wake Lily on July 28th?
2. What does the following quote reveal about Lily? “After you get stung, you can’t get unstung no matter how much you whine about it”
3. What do May and Rosaleen do on this sweltering day?
4. What simile does Lily use to explain why she keeps the hose turned on June, even though June is plainly angry?
5. How does Rosaleen’s wisdom end the hostilities?
6. What does June do that astonishes Lily?
7. When does Lily say “the real troubles in life happen?” What does she mean?
8. Who does Lily say is behind her hidden doors?
9. What is May doing, and why is it so significant to Lily?
10. What does May do after she acknowledges that she knew Lily’s mother?
11. Why do you think Lily dreams of her mother as a roach “with her worst nature exposed?”
12. What is the significance of the simile Lily uses to describe her life at this point?
13. What had Lily been about to do when Zach talks her into going with him?

14. When the boy provokes the white man, Lily says she sees a look on his face she had seen on T. Ray's "a thousand times" (178). What is that look?
15. August says, "The hardest thing on earth is choosing what matters." Does Zach make a choice that matters?
16. When they finally get to see Zach, what does August talk about? Why do you think she does this?
17. What does Lily say everyone wants?
18. What is another example of foreshadowing? Why do you think the author chose to "warn" the reader on these occasions?
19. Why does Lily think the rocks should be thanked?
20. The quote at the beginning of the chapter has to do with communication. What messages are sent in this chapter?

Chapter Ten

1. When they are searching for May, Lily begins to say the "Hail Mary" prayer. What does Lily say about her reasons for doing so?
2. Where do they find May?
3. To what does Lily compare finding May's body?
4. Interpret this sentence: "This had been the thing they'd been waiting for half their lives without even realizing it"
5. Why does the policeman ask Lily so many questions?
6. What is a vigil, and why does August say they are going to hold one?
7. What does Lily pray for May to do for her?
8. What sentence describes the change Lily sees in Zach?
9. Interpret Lily's description of blame: "...the blame would find a way to stick to them. That's how blame was"
10. What do August and Zach and Lily do to the hives and why?
11. What is the secret thing which causes Lily's gladness?
12. What does Lily think is "a better plan" for blacks and whites to get along? How is this

somewhat contradictory to her next observation?

13. What does August say May meant for June to do when she said, “Don’t mess it up?”

14. The quote at the beginning of the chapter is another example of the author foreshadowing a sad part of the book. Why might some people object to this?

Chapter Eleven

1. Why can Lily not tell August about herself now that May’s funeral is over?

2. Why is Lily walking in the woods, counting how long it takes her to see a bird land in a tree?

3. What does June say the wind does for her when she goes out with Neil?

4. Why does Zach tell Lily they have to think about changing the world?

5. How has Zach changed?

6. Interpret the meaning of August’s putting May’s suicide note into a deep crevice in the black Mary.

7. What does June finally agree to? Why?

8. What part of the Mary Day ceremony makes Lily “feel better about the world?”

9. August says that “remembering is everything” and that is why they reenact the chaining of Mary. Why does this bother Lily?

10. What is the fish necklace that the boys put on Lily? What upsets her the most about the incident?

11. What is the new necklace that Zach gives to Lily, and what does he promise?

12. What do you think is the relevance of the quote at the beginning of this chapter?

Chapter Twelve

1. What does Lily say is a “big shock” when she looks at the pictures of Mary in August’s room?

2. Why had August not told Lily that she knew who Lily was when she arrived?

3. What causes the “wall of glass” to break in Lily’s chest?

4. What does Lily say happens one or two moments in your life?

5. When Lily hears that secret, what does she hear? What does August say about it?
6. How does August explain June's resentment of Lily?
7. Interpret this quote: "June always said that most people bit off more than they could chew, but August chewed more than she bit off"
8. How does August describe Deborah as a little girl?
9. How does August's description of T. Ray clash with Lily's knowledge of him?
10. Why did Deborah get married, and why does the knowledge upset Lily?
11. What does Lily say she wants to be when she grows up? What does she mean?
12. What is the final bit of information August gives Lily that causes Lily to say she hates her mother?
13. What does August say to excuse Deborah?
14. When she thinks she has disappointed August, Lily says, "Some of my pridefulness drained out" How was it prideful of her to criticize her mother?
15. Why was Deborah back in Sylvan when she was killed?
16. What does August remind Lily before she leaves?
17. How does the quote at the beginning of the chapter relate to Lily's anguish?

Chapter Thirteen

1. What does Lily want from Mary?
2. What does Lily say is the "really terrible thing?"
3. How does Lily act out her anger?
4. What does Lily want the statue to do?
5. Lily says that she could lock the bitter tone in her voice forever. What does she mean?
6. Rosaleen is not surprised when Lily tells her that her mother left her. Why did Rosaleen not tell Lily that she had suspected as much?
7. What does Lily ask August to do for her?
8. What does August do with the honey during the Mary ceremony? Why is Lily a little

annoyed by it?

9. Why does Lily want to be the last to clean her hands?
10. What does August bring to Lily in the hat box?
11. What does August say about the mirror? What does she mean?
12. What does Lily find on the brush?
13. How does Lily interpret the poem by William Blake that her mother had underlined?
14. Describe the picture in the frame. What does Lily conclude when she sees this picture?
15. How does the description of the worker bee at the beginning of the chapter fit Lily?

Chapter Fourteen

1. What is the simile Lily uses to describe her heart?
2. What does Lily believe people would rather die than do?
3. Why does Lily think she must have loved her “little collection of hurts and wounds?”
4. What is the “peculiar nature of the world?”
5. What does August say to June while looking at Lily? What is she trying to tell Lily?
6. Why does Lily think both she and Zach are “doomed to misery?”
7. Why does Lily run up the stairs after Rosaleen?
8. When Lily cleans out the honey house that night, she finally figures out why she has been carrying around the mouse bones. What does she think?
9. What is Lily’s last thought as she drifts off to sleep?
10. What does August show to Lily?
11. August explains why she told the Beatrix story to Lily, and her reason is not what Lily thought. What was August trying to say?
12. What does August tell Lily that she wants Lily always to remember?
13. Who comes to the door at 2:00 P.M.? How did T. Ray find Lily?
14. Why is it a shock to T. Ray to see the pin on her shoulder?

15. What does Lily suddenly understand when T. Ray realizes that he is in the house where Deborah was?
16. Lily “heard the bitter tone” in her own voice and realized that she could “slip off into a cold place where meanness took over.” How does that parallel her realization about T. Ray?
17. Is T. Ray seeing Lily when he hits her?
18. How does Lily bring T. Ray back and make him see only her?
20. Why does Lily feel that T. Ray has said “everything” when he says, “You look like her?”
21. How does Lily’s interpretation of Queenie’s expression provide comic relief at this tense moment?
22. What does August say about what to do when you need something? How does she act on her words with T. Ray?
23. Lily asks her father once more about her mother’s death. Do you think T. Ray is telling the truth?
24. Lily believes in the “goodness of imagination” What is she imagining?
25. Who becomes Lily’s first girl friend?
26. What is high school like for Lily?
27. Where does August say Mary goes when she rises?
28. Who are the moons shining over Lily?

Final writing assignment for Secret Life of Bees

The Secret Life of Bees chronicles just a month or two in the life of 14 year old Lily Owens. There are times throughout the book when some of the choices she makes may disagree with what you would have done in the same situation. There are also things that happen in the book that make you sympathize with Lily or begrudge her, depending on your point of view, for the choices she makes.

For this creative writing assignment, YOU will take on the role of Sue Monk Kidd and re-write the end of the novel in exactly the way YOU would want it to happen. You can pick up the story at any point but your paper must also include a glimpse into the future for Lily and at least three other characters from the book. For instance, you might choose

to start your story right after June agrees to marry Neil or right before May kills herself. Maybe you like the book just as it is and would prefer to write about what happens after the book ends. You can fast forward 10, 20, even 50 years into the future. It's totally up to you.

Here are some things that are NOT up to you:

- Your story must be at least **TWO PAGES LONG**, typed, double-spaced, 12 point font.
- You must address the characters in a way that is relatively consistent with how they have been characterized in the novel. For instance, you can't decide to have June shoot Lily and then kill Neil and herself in a bloody gun battle. What you're going for is REALISM. The more believable your extrapolation of the story, the better your grade.
- You must address the future of Lily and at least **THREE** other characters from the book.
- Using as many literary devices as possible will drive your grade upward without question. Similes, metaphors, alliteration, symbolism, diction, etc...the more the better.
- The use of dialogue really helps to drive the story forward. There should be some dialogue in the two + pages that you write.
- Have fun! This is creative writing – be creative!